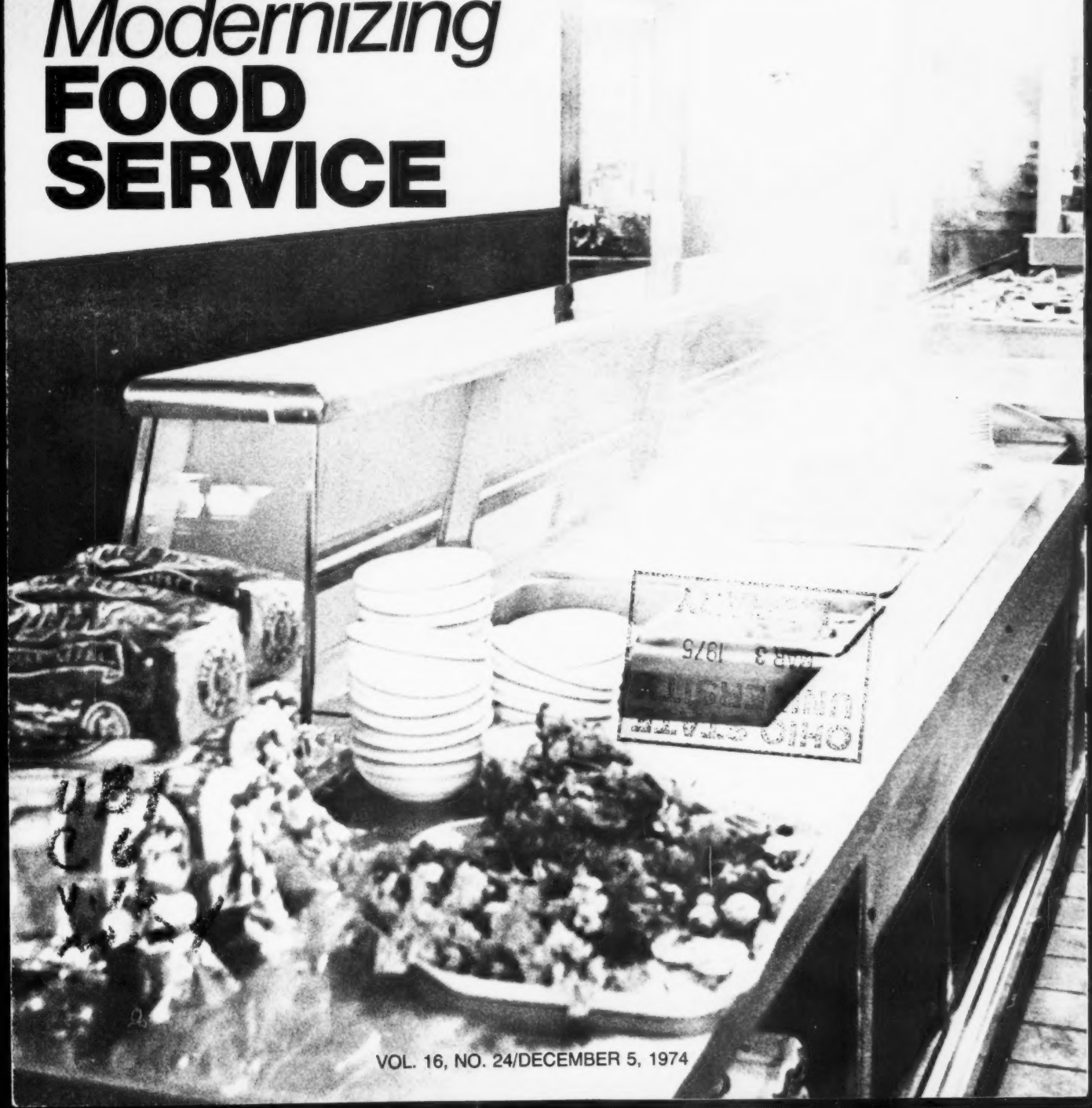
COMMANDERS DIGEST

Modernizing FOOD SERVICE



VOL. 16, NO. 24/DECEMBER 5, 1974

Streamlining Functions and Accomplishing Savings

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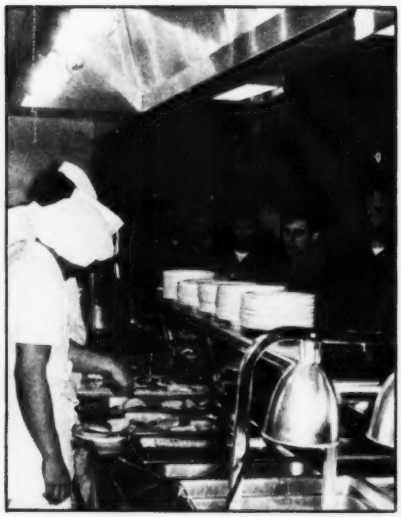
These are rather critical and changing times for DoD and for our country. I would like to provide some data to illustrate why it is important that we streamline our military food system. There is a need for DoD to reduce expenses so that more funds will be available for investments such as Research, Development, Testing & Engineering (RDT&E). In FY 1966 the percentage of the DoD budget devoted to investments (RDT&E, procurement, construction, etc.) was nearly equal to the percentage of the budget devoted to expenses (support of military personnel, retired pay, operations & maintenance, etc.). Since that time, the percentages have diverged until in FY 1974 the percentages stood at approximately 62 per cent for expenses and 33 per cent for investments—and they are predicted to get worse. Therefore, we are putting less of our money into modernizing our forces (investments) and more into operating and supporting the forces we have (expenses). This is at a time when, in terms of purchasing power, the DoD budget is at the lowest level since FY 1951 and our military manpower is at the lowest level in 25 years.

The emphasis then must be on maximizing the capability of these forces and this means modernization. But to modernize we must have more investment money and on a relatively fixed or decreasing budget, the only way to do this is to reduce expenses. Since the pay, care and support, and training of our military personnel are the largest of our expenses, we must continue to strive for economies in this area.

Our food service system offers one of the most promising avenues by which we may be able to reduce our expenses and improve our manpower "tooth to tail" ratio; that is, increase the number of combat troops in proportion to the number of support personnel required. Civilianization of food service operations in the garrison feeding environments is and has been one of the means by which DoD has attempted to achieve this objective. Civilianization reduces both the number of military support personnel required and the overall cost of food service.

The Military Departments seem to have no major problems with civilianizing the food service function at established bases but they insist that they maintain a significant number of military food service personnel to support the combat troops when they are in the



Records show that only about 33 per cent of enlisted personnel are currently using military dining facilities while 52 per cent are drawing BAS (basic allowance for subsistance) for separate rations. The remaining 15 per cent are authorized to use dining halls but are absent from meals.

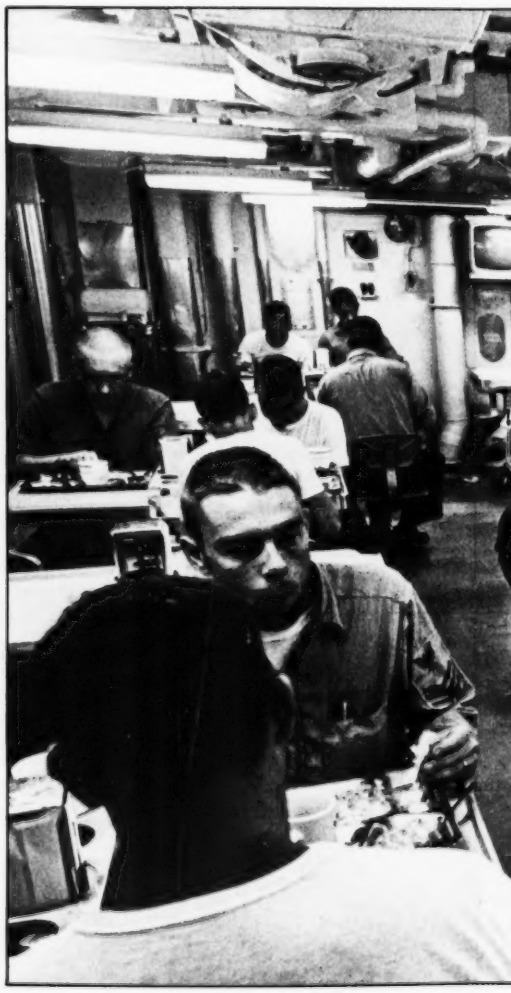
field. While I agree that the food service function probably cannot be civilianized in this situation, I am convinced that we can reduce the number and skill level of the military personnel required.

This is then a fertile and critical area for streamlining functions and accomplishing savings and is why the field feeding study being conducted by Natick Laboratories' operations research group is so important. This study will result in new field feeding systems that will reduce the need for support personnel in combat and therefore, military food service personnel for normal troop feeding. Once the Natick recommendations are in, I believe they will also show that this is an area which will need considerable R&D effort—an effort in which the R&DA can be of invaluable assistance in developing the technology necessary to support the new combat feeding system. One example of things which will probably need to be developed is heat processed bulk foods in semirigid containers.

Another problem which we have is that for some time now a number of people, including many Service people, have been telling us that the traditional way we manage our dining halls at our established bases is not compatible with the life style of today's soldier.

Today's enlisted volunteer is more affluent and mobile and wants a choice as to where, when and what he eats. He doesn't want to be tied to the dining hall. After all, an E-1 now makes $344 a month plus room and board, as compared to $86 a month in 1952. This same behavior has shown up in college feeding as well and appears to be a product of our society as much as it is of greater affluence. Our records show that we only feed about 33 per cent of our enlisted personnel and that approximately 52 per cent are already on separate rations and receive a cash basic allowance termed BAS (basic allowance for subsistence). This leaves about 15 per cent who are authorized to eat in the dining halls free but are absent from meals. While 15 per cent may not sound high, this translates to over 300,000 rations or 900,000 meals a day that are skipped for one reason or another.

It has been proposed that all enlisted personnel be given a basic allowance for subsistence and that they be allowed to spend it as they see fit. Our dining halls would then be run much like commercial cafeterias with each item taken and paid for on an a la carte basis. The Air Force has successfully pioneered this BAS/a la carte system at Shaw Air Force Base, South Carolina, and I have asked each of the other Services to test it at least at one installation. I am concerned not only because the system appears to be more compatible with the life style and desires of today's enlisted personnel but also because it eliminates irritants and problems associated with the present system, requires better inventory control, reduces food waste, provides better management and budget control, and shifts more of the responsibility to the individual



Civilianization of food service operations reduces both the number of support personnel required and the overall cost of food service. In some cases, however, such as ships at sea (below) this avenue is not feasible.

to feed and care for himself. Of equal importance is that this system provides much greater flexibility in the management of our food service program and would permit possible adjustments by DoD to achieve some of the reductions in budget expenses that I originally mentioned.

However, at present this system does not appear to be cost effective in that it calls for DoD to pay for those 300,000 rations which are now being skipped each day. The picture is not as bleak as it first appears though in that the rising cost of feeding as compared with the more stable BAS rate has reduced this system's excess cost by some $26 million in a short period of time. Further study to elucidate cost savings and these changing cost factors may eventually make the BAS/a la carte system much more cost effective. In addition to the costs, the Services have questioned the applicability of this system for combat, field and shipboard feeding. While it may not be suitable for certain feeding situations, such as combat, this does not decrease its applicability for routine feeding. The fact that all officers and over 50 per cent of the enlisted personnel are already on separate rations (BAS) would indicate that the system can be used.

It is important to realize that there are factors external to the food service area which may have more impact on the food service system than those factors within food service. Continued budget limitations, the desire to reduce expenses, and changes to the military pay system are some of the factors capable of resulting in changes to our food service system. Changes caused by factors outside the system cannot or are not scheduled and controlled by food service and thus result in abrupt and sudden changes. Putting DoD on a single salary system would be an example of such a change. It is only prudent that responsible food service personnel try to anticipate such changes. The Natick Laboratories is scheduled to play a significant role in these BAS/a la carte tests under the DoD Food RDT&E program and is presently assisting each Service in scheduling these tests and in establishing test procedures. Natick will also assist in conducting surveys, monitoring the tests and evaluating results.

I am very pleased with the development of the DoD Food RDT&E program. Such projects as the Fort Lewis, Washington, and Travis Air Force Base, California, studies, consumer surveys at many installations, as well as the Uniform Ration Cost System and Field Feeding studies, are example of the new efforts. The results of the recently completed Uniform Ration Cost System study give DoD a much clearer picture of how DoD's level of feeding compares with other countries and provide numerous recommendations for improvements in the management and operation of the DoD food program. This study has also provided the data necessary for the development of Uniform Ration legislation—a DoD effort that goes back about 20 years. My office has the responsibility for implementing the many results and recommendations of this study and I can assure you that this will be done to the maximum extent possible. In the restricted funding situation that DoD finds itself in, R&D projects will continue to be tailored to Service and DoD problems with more immediate payoffs. DoD will continue to look to the R&DA for assistance and support.

Food specifications have been the subject of many presentations, panels and discussions at R&DA meetings. I can only add to this continuing dialogue my support for streamlining the specifications; that is, reducing nonessential requirements and bringing specifications as close to commercial equivalent products as possible. Since most of the special specification requirements, such as increased shelf life and packaging protection, are necessitated by the rigors of our storage and distribution system, it appears we need to streamline our distribution system first. Rather than wait for a change to this monolithic system, it may be that we should change the specifications first, which would require that the procurement and distribution system be changed to handle commercial equivalent products.

To accomplish its specification mission it is necessary that Natick maintains an intimate knowledge of industry's capabilities, which I believe can only be done by visiting the processing plants, such as has been done in the meat area with great success. Certainly the R&DA can assist Natick to obtain this knowledge of industry's capability, and the state of the art to assure that specifications are workable documents. Under the present market conditions where demand exceeds supply and DoD has increasing difficulty procuring the foods needed, it behooves both Natick and the Defense

COMMANDERS DIGEST

Vol. 16, No. 24, December 5, 1974
A publication of the Department of Defense to provide official and professional information to commanders and key personnel on matters related to Defense policies, programs and interests, and to create better understanding and teamwork within the Department of Defense.

Published weekly by the American Forces Press Service, 1117 N. 19th St., Arlington, Va. 22209, a unified activity of the Office of Information for the Armed Forces, OASD (M&RA). Reproduction of content is authorized.

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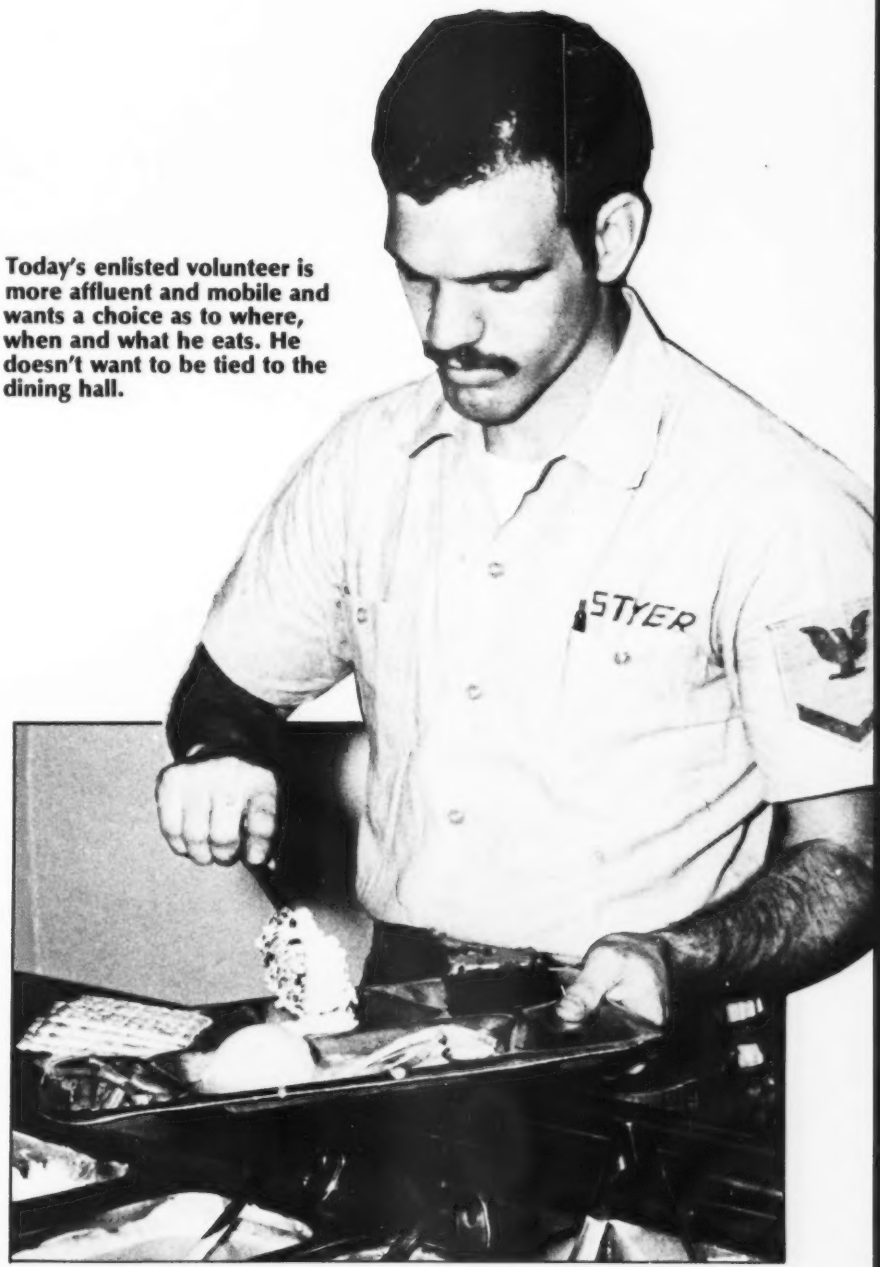
Personnel Support Center (DPSC) to review and change their procedures as necessary to improve DoD's position in the market. Good management is after all the ability to make changes to meet changing conditions.

In this era of seeming constant change and in our efforts to streamline the DoD food system, the need for a laboratory such as the Natick Laboratories is greater than ever. There has been some discussion in Congressional reports and correspondence and in DoD on Natick becoming a DoD laboratory. Without reflecting on past performances or present organizations, I believe that this concept has considerable merit. Natick as a DoD laboratory and executive agent for DoD programs in its areas of expertise would provide a consolidation of programs and more efficient and effective utilization of resources. This would result in joint staffing, more effective management of programs, greater visibility, improved communications and better budget control. I am sure that overall there would be some cost savings to DoD as well.

Under such an organization the Services would retain control of the programs through Joint Service formulation boards as is now accomplished with the DoD Food RDT&E program. There should be an overall improvement in the Services' R&D programs. It appears that, at present, the most appropriate place for Natick as a DoD laboratory would be in the Defense Supply Agency. However, Natick would be a separate Defense R&D Center and not under the control of the procurement organizations such as the DPSC. The Services and industry would still coordinate on the specification so that their independence and integrity would be maintained.

Let me introduce one more point in closing. I question whether subsistence can continue to



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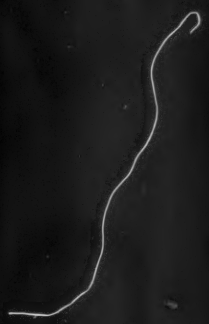
The Air Force has pioneered the BAS/a la carte system at Shaw AFB, S.C. Each of the other Services has been asked to test the program.

operate as a close and protected system in continually tighter budget situations. Our traditional food service system, which has usually escaped making sacrifices in the past, will face new challenges and changes. Even the level of feeding, which has remained the same through all periods of inflation and budget constraints and which Natick found to be justified in its Uniform Ration Cost System study, may be reduced. The question will be whether DoD can continue to justify feeding the troops the same menu, regardless of inflation and resulting budget deficits, when civilians, officers and enlisted personnel on separate rations are forced to reduce their level of feeding? Under the present system with continuing inflation enlisted personnel eating in the dining facilities in effect received a pay raise each month. The menus could still be well balanced and filling but the number of expensive entrees would be reduced. The BAS/a la carte system, which I mentioned earlier, shows to advantage here in that each individual determines what his/her level of feeding will be; that is, is that steak really worth the price to him or her.

There is a definite trend within Congress and DoD to shift more responsibility to the individual for his personal needs. This may take place by requiring customers to pay more of the cost of operating commissary stores and even of building new ones, and of operating recreation and hobby facilities. In subsistence, the individual may have to accept the responsibility for feeding himself and for managing his money so he can buy enough to eat each day. Eating well balanced meals will be the individual's responsibility just as keeping physically fit is now.

In closing I reiterate that in the present and continuing austere environment that DoD finds itself in, there is even greater need for the Natick Laboratories, the DoD Food RDT&E program, R&DA, and industry to study and provide DoD with the ideas, recommendations, products and data necessary for the continued streamlining of its food systems. Efficiencies and economies introduced into the subsistence system today which reduce expenses could return to Natick tomorrow in the form of investments for even greater R&D efforts.

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